

## KHALIL I. AL-FUZAI LIFE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

Khalil I. Al-Fuzai is a Saudi Arabian short story writer. He managed to help in introducing the Saudi culture to others and tried his utmost to address many social, political, and religious aspects he found in his society. In this short article, Al-Fuzai will be introduced to the English readers of this journal.

**KEYWORDS:** AL-Fuzai, Saudi, Short Story

### INTRODUCTION

#### Life & Background

In 1940, Khalil I. Al-Fuzai was born in Al-Jasha, a small village in Al-Ahsa, the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. He grew up in this village, and went to the elementary school there. Then, he pursued his studies at Al-Mahaad Al-Elmy (intermediate and secondary school) in Al-Ahsa until 1960.

Later, Al-Fuzai left to Dammam searching for work in 1961. There he managed to improve his knowledge through reading on his own. He worked for the Ministry of Education, then for the Ministry of Information. After a while, he turned to journalism.

In 1964, Al-Fuzai joined Al-Youm Newspaper where he held different posts: a proof reader, copy editor, and finally an editor-in-chief in 1984. He resigned in 1991 to give his entire attention to his own business. Furthermore, he went to Qatar, a neighboring state, in 1973, and shared in establishing Dar Al-Ahad for Journalism and Distribution there. Now Al-Fuzai has a daily column in the Saudi Arabian Al-Youm Newspaper. He writes for other publications in various fields. He writes political, literary, social, and critical articles. He participates in preparing and presenting some TV and radio programs. He has presented in many conferences as well.

### CONTRIBUTIONS; THEMES & EXAMPLES

So far, Al-Fuzai has written seven collections of short stories. They reflect the wide variety of his experience. In addition to his creative ability, he is unique with regard to his themes and his style of writing. His themes might be summarized as follows: the pre-oil society and its life, the family's happiness, unequal marriage and its problems, low income and economic consequences, daily life and social traditions, the conflict between the old and the new, the past and the present, traditions and civilization, and dream (hope) and reality. In the following paragraphs, you will read some translated passages from Al-Fuzai's writings to clarify how he handles some of these themes.

In "Alienation," we read the following excerpt that depicts a part of the village's life:

Beautiful dreams that decorate the awaiting moments . . . awaiting the arrival at the  
loved village . . . the strong welcome that it longs for . . . the great and wonderful feelings that  
jostle inside me . . . the friendly memoirs that tickle my mind . . . all that go in vain . . . it turns  
into blood dripping from the hands stretched with a clear enmity to the absentee who  
returns . . .

...

The wonderful evenings at the public square of the village . . the latent stories in our minds where we start and retell their details . . Surat Al-Fatihah (Chapter of the Opening) and Ayat Al-Kursi (the Verse of the Throne) protect everyone while returning home after chatting in the moonlit nights and using a hand-light which is used by all of us on an alternative basis . . we are young . . drink the moon's light . . and travel to worlds that have never been visited before . . venture in the universe's labyrinth . . yet at the end we discover that we indeed chat in the evenings at the public square of the village and that less than half of the night is left . .

Does time erase the features of those beautiful memoirs . . ? <sup>1</sup>

Al-Fuzai comes to the world of literature to honestly introduce simple and real pictures of the Saudi Arabian countryside. It is the countryside where Al-Fuzai himself was born and grew up. The main character of "Alienation" believes,

My love of it [the village] does not abate . . my love of it is my life . . and how does a man give up his life . . how can I prove to them that I love the land . . I wish that I could have a real kiss with its soil . . and cover my head with its surface . .

Some children gather . . look at me with astonishment as if they were looking at a creature coming from an alien world . . I try to talk with one of them . . all run away like frightened horses . . one of them would have been my son if I did not leave the village . . it would be possible to talk with them if I stayed there . . everything would be possible if I did not leave . . <sup>2</sup>

Al-Fuzai stands as a critic of his society as well. He depicts it as if it were in front of his reader with an honest portrait. When it comes to certain issues like marriage, education, child abuse, etc., he does not hesitate to make it clear that wrong and bad habits should be corrected in the society. The story "Many Hands" addresses child abuse and its consequences;

He has killed his father?

Is this act the extreme limit of foolishness?

At that time he saw with the eye of reason what he had done; he imagined that to be the only escape that would rid him of his father's cruelty, and it would make him able to inherit his father's wealth after all . . he felt at ease with the idea of killing, generally and minutely.

....

He is not aware of what is going on around him . . the last word he spat at their faces was "NO" when the officer asked him, "Do you have anything else to say?"<sup>3</sup>

In Al-Fuzai's stories, one finds himself reading a social history as well. It is not any history; it is one that is written by a person who is a part of that history. In the following excerpt from the story "Revenge," one will read about the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990:

The sky of Kuwait grows dark after being overcast with black clouds . . its streets wear grief . . empty of anything except some burnt cars or those whose tires were

taken and discarded on both sides of the street. Here and there . . . some invaders gather around an inquisition center with some military cars and equipment; over bridges and on the rooftops of buildings heavy artillery are installed . . the facades of houses on the main streets are turned into fortifications for the invaders . . inhabitants keep to their homes, staying inside unless it is necessary to go out or it is time for prayer . . the district of Al-Rumeitha is full of officers and soldiers looking for the resistance group . .

. . . .

In one of the Al-Rumeitha villas . . the officer and six of his soldiers are questioning and beating Ahmed's mother . . who is resisting despite her wounds . . stubborn despite her enemies' cruelty . . as if they wanted to hideously humiliate her; when three soldiers with an order from their officer take the maid to a room . . she returns crying . . her clothes have been torn . . terror is drawn on her face . . shame tears her feelings . . she tries to cover her chest with her torn dress . . it does not take her long to faint, and when Ahmed's mother tries to succor her . . a soldier kicks her away . . she stands in front of him challenging . . he pushes her with the end of his gun until she bumps against the wall . . with an iron voice he says, "Tell us the names of your son's friends."<sup>4</sup>

Al-Fuzai's stories do not only explore the social and historic ideas of rural people, but also probe the psychological sides of his characters. Indeed, he has been able to create characters whose psychological, social, and even physical features are derived from the real rural milieu. All this is expressed in a simple, clear, and uncomplicated style. In "Eurythmics on the Pavement of Danger," the hero tells

I became acquainted with her when we studied communication at Kuwait University . . a story of love grew between us and became the topic of our colleagues' talk . . . even our families' topic . . we intended to marry in a few years after our graduation.

One day, I said to her, "Tomorrow when each of us goes to his country . . how can one entertain the self without the other?"

She said, "And why does one entertain the self without the other? . . you live with me in the heart, oh my eye."

"And you are living with me as well in the heart, oh my heart."

"The day of our marriage will be the day of my real birthday."

And we graduated . . each returned to his country . . each worked as a journalist . . but . . but she died while reporting from the front in the Al-Ahwar region . .

. . . .

On this day, which is the first of March . . colleagues of the same profession start arriving from all over the world, in order to report the entrance of the allied armies in a free Kuwait, and because we arrived a few hours earlier than them, we became the object of

others' attention, and that granted us unforgettable memories.

Among the waves of happiness . . her face appeared calm, assured . . as if she wants to share (us) in this unique happiness.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Fuzai's style is clear, simple, and at the same time literary and carefully chosen. He manages to combine both what is called the "standard" language and the local dialect of Al-Ahsa in a fluid, understandable literary style. In his short story "If Reason Is Known," we read

The disk of the sun is about to disappear in the horizon, and the café owner lights up his electric lamps . . ears can hear the Muazen's<sup>6</sup> call to the prayer from a nearby mosque . .

His quarrelsome friend responds, "There are two reasons: number one is that I know her family, and the second reason is that I am looking for comfort and rest—how wonderful it is when you return to your house and find everything as it should be . . food is ready . . clothes are clean . . your house is tidy.

"Did I say, 'there are two reasons?'" No. Indeed, they are three . . the third one is my love for a familial atmosphere. A small family . . a wife and children . . all that is good, isn't it?

\* \* \*

"Did I say, 'three reasons . . .?'" No. In fact, there are four reasons . . the fourth is that I am getting older, and if I do not marry right now, I will not find the one who will accept to marry me later . . the train of age is proceeding fast; it should stop at the station of marriage.

\* \* \*

"Did I say, 'there are four reasons to marry?'" No. There are five and the fifth is that one of my friends has married one of her friends and he has recommended her for me to marry since a while."

His quarrelsome and vehement disputer is not convinced with all the reasons mentioned above . . his looks are doubtful . . so that he admits his intentions, saying, "Did I say, 'five reasons?'" The truth is that it is one reason; she is a school headmistress and has three big buildings."

And they go to the Maghrip prayer.<sup>7</sup>

11/25/1976<sup>8</sup>

As a matter of fact, Al-Fuzai is a journalist who knows how to address his audience. He depicts the village and its people with minute details that make readers feel they are standing in front of a professional painting. In the story "Reaching the End," we read the following:

He starts walking in the quiet of night and its frightful silence, and everything is still, with the exception of the intermittent barking of dogs and the croaking of frogs coming from the big marshes that stretch endlessly outside the village . . the alleys are, as usual, full of dirt and stagnant water.

. . . .

. . he suddenly stops, imagining that he has heard a voice. Then, after he tightens his igaal<sup>9</sup> he continues walking and throws the two ends of his torn ghutra<sup>10</sup> to hang over his back, which allows him to scratch his neck that is planted vigorously above his thin body. He deludes himself that he is brave and that he has to prove so.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to Al-Fuzai's creativity, style and themes, his stories represent a new stage --a stage of change. They compare village and city, tradition and civilization, past and present. In the face of the modern changes of life, one has to move in the same direction, but to what extent? Al-Fuzai is aware of modern changes, yet he neither ignores nor forgets the culture and traditions that determine the identity of his society. Hence, his characters tend to be young ordinary-educated people who try to absorb and understand what is new, and at the same time try to preserve their culture. In many cases we see them trying to reach some sort of stability and balance between the two opposites. "The Crazy Street" portrays the conflict:

No one knows who was the first person to call this street by this name—no one except Allah.

. . . .

Virtue commits suicide on this street, yet it is a temporary suicide. It does not exceed a few hours in the afternoon and a little time in the early evening. Yet it is worrisome to those for whom circumstances require crossing this street, lest they are accused of corruption and joining the stream of those who are eager to destroy values they believe to be old.

On one of the benches scattered in front of the small café, Doheiman sits observing almost startled at the coming and going of busty girls whose boobs protrude until they are about to tear the firmly tight clothes that cover them. It is a new thing for him to watch this continuous human crowd . . and this surprising temptation in the street, and he remembers the desert women whose complexion is burnt with the sun and whose skin colors turn brown . . <sup>12</sup>

Al-Fuzai's characters strive for balance because they cannot ignore their traditional norms of which they should be proud, and at the same time they cannot isolate themselves in a time when the whole world has become a small village, and the contact with other cultures is inevitable. Accordingly, his characters are interested in change to the extent they can live their lives happily, but not to the point of being intense and extreme where they may neglect their traditions and values. "The Crazy Street" continues,

Doheiman says, "They are beautiful . . do you admire them?"

The man is so busy watching the two women that he does not hear what has been said by Doheiman who in turn repeats, "They are beautiful."

"Whom do you mean?"

"I mean the two women you are looking at . . look."

And he winks after throwing an inquisitive glance at the two women, and they come closer, and when he turns toward the man to continue his commentary which is not at

all polite . . he notices that the color of the man's face has changed, and unforgettable state of anger has overcome him, so he asks, "What is the matter?"

He does not respond.

So Doheiman continues his remarks while the man stays still as if he is experiencing a period of calm that precedes a storm, his eyes stiffen on Doheiman with dim snowy looks, then he yells at his face, "What did you say?"

Doheiman is shocked to hear him shout, so he asks, "What makes you angry?"

"How do you dare to say these indecent remarks?"

"Which indecent remarks?"

"Is there anything more indecent than your utterances?"

He is angry to the extreme, so he presses on, "Do you not realize that these two women are my wife and sister?"<sup>13</sup>

In his stories, Al-Fuzai writes about the simple rural poor people who struggle and search for a better life--for a life that is full of hope, love, and respect. His story heroes are either simple villagers who are charmed with the city-life, and at the same time who hate its hypocrisy and complexity, or poor people who are psychologically disappointed and hope for their luck to come. In "In the Café," we see how the hero is struggling for a better life:

And he follows the short waiter with his looks, until he disappears in the small room so as to bring the tea, but he allows for his looks to penetrate the walls of the small room and extend to the furthest north . . there, where the sea lies with no choice . . leaving the city kneel under its feet in a desperate giving-up . . the sea holds land secrets in its big womb . . and hides tyrannical cruelty behind its doubtful calm . . the sea has put the end of his father, the sailor . . so as to leave him alone facing the hardships of life . . working to make his living for his mother and his two little brothers . . life is not as he wants . . and the luxury he has dreamt of is over with the death of his father, he has no other choice but to take his father's place and becomes a sailor . . he has learnt the profession from accompanying his father in the days when weather used to be good.<sup>14</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

However, Al-Fuzai is one of the Saudi Arabian writers who try to write about their society. Similar writers include Abdul-Aziz Mushree, Rugayah As-Shabeeb, Shareefa As-Shamlan, Ghazi Al-Guseibee, Turki Al-Hamad, and others. What makes Al-Fuzai different is that he is a journalist who knows how to address his audience accordingly. He also devotes most of his efforts to focus on the rural society.

In brief, Al-Fuzai has written seven collections of short stories. He tries in his stories to introduce simple and real pictures of the Saudi Arabian society. The seven collections of short stories are: *Palm Tree and the Watch* (1977), *Women and Love* (1978), *Thursday Fair* (1979), *Some Suspicion* (1993), *Torture That Does Not Die* (1998), *Rhythms for the Coming Time* (1999), and *A Moment of Collapse* (2000). In addition, Al-Fuzai has other article-combined works: *Speeches on Literature* (1966), *Journalistic Thoughts* (1981), *A Look on Precincts of Time* (1991), *Chapters on Loving Homeland* (1992), *Days in the Land of Uncle Sam* (1993), and *Intersection of Questions* (1999). With the exception of *Thursday Fair*, all these collections are still in Arabic.

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4. - -. "Revenge." *Torture That Does Not Die*. Dammam: Eastern Province Literary Club, 1998. PP. 7-16.
5. - -. "Eurythmics on the Pavement of Danger." *Torture That Does Not Die*. Dammam: Eastern Province Literary Club, 1998. PP. 81-89.
6. Muazen: a Muslim who calls to congregational prayers.
7. Maghrip prayer: a prayer Muslims make at sunset.
8. Al-Fuzai, Khalil I. "If Reason Is Known..." *A moment of Collapse*. Tabouk: Tabouk Literary Club, 2000. PP. 89-93.
9. "igaal": a cord, usually black, used to tighten the headdress.
10. "ghutra": a headdress.
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